

On Creating an International
Information System on Visual Impairment
and Blindness

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April 1977

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Executive Summary

The meeting on "Creating an International Information System on Blindness" was held in London on 12th April, 1977. It focussed on five major areas: Who will use such an information system? Where are the primary responsibilities for system operation to be located? How should the work of the several centres of data bases be optimally articulated? and, What are the trade-offs in the natural language choices which must be made in terms of costs and demand of users?

We concluded that the major users will comprise, at first, primarily researchers engaged in social, technological, and education research; designers and developers of sensory aids- and rehabilitation agents, teachers, and administrators of agencies.

The scope of the system will be limited to visual impairment, blindness, and certain aspects of auditory impairment necessary to contain the interests of the deaf-blind. Within these constraints, data will be gathered that satisfy the need for current awareness in research and application of sensory aids, and of technological and social-technological development (including innovative practice).

The responsibility of maintaining data bases, it is suggested, should proceed from those now under way (technological and social research in the U.K., sensory aids in the U.S.A.), toward further data bases located

elsewhere (see below).

The insurance of common indexing, assignation of terms, definition of record formats, agreement on culling older files, duplication of tapes, etc., etc., comprise a series of technical questions that can be settled among operators of the several data bases (see below).

The vexing question of what natural languages will be included was not settled, beyond noting that English has been used so far as the lingua franca, but with the acknowledgement that this is a compromise not entirely satisfactory to all potential users.

At several points in the above agenda discussion, the need for guidance and counsel from the WCWB was acknowledged and noted.

For the immediate future, it is recommended that agreement be secured on the content of a comprehensive information system, comprising the following individual data bases:

1. Social, technological, and education research (U.K.);
2. Listing of main organisations of and for the blind, with summary of main activities, contacts and publications(U.K.);
3. Additional sources of information on sensory aids and the conduct of research and the application of innovative practice (U.K.);
4. Listing of serially produced and commercially available sensory aids and appliances, including listings of prototype forms of such aids (U.S.A.);

5. A listing of vocations and vocational aids needed for that job (Paris with collaborators);
6. Bibliographic data specific to the field that would make search for information on prior work, in detail, much less costly than at present (U.S.A., with collaborators);
7. Compilation and listing of techniques which may (a) obviate the need for a sensory aid, or which (b) substitute for aids when funds are not available for aids (U.S.A., with collaborators);
8. Educational materials listing specifically matched to the needs of special education for visually impaired, blind, and low vision students (no venue yet determined);
9. Selected additional files, such as of diapositives (colour slides), literature on aids, brochures, etc., (no venue yet determined).

In furtherance of creation of such an information system, it was recommended that two steps be taken:

First, the distribution of a discussion document containing reports of meetings on this subject, and suggestions for future plans. This recommendation is satisfied by the issuance of the present report.

Second, the undertaking of a survey study among members of the WCWB and interested others, to fix the degree of interest in the kinds of data an international information system would provide, and to determine the costs and willingness to find funds for those costs, on the part of potential users of such a system. It is recommended that funds for such a study be sought by and in the name of WCWB from international sources.

At a further meeting in Paris an agreement was arrived at with the Laboratoire de recherche pour la réinsertion professionnelle des handicapés, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers to create the machine-readable data base on job opportunities referred to in item 5 above.

